

Morris K. Udall -- Selected Articles:

A National Park for the Sonoran Desert by Morris K. Udall

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When the Rio Grande Chapter's third conference on Natural Areas in the Southwest was held in Santa Fe in November 1966, many of the most pleasant moments were provided by the Honorable Morris K. Udall, Congressman from Arizona. The way the speech was delivered counted for as much as the content, and consequently every effort has been made in transcribing it to preserve the flavor and ease of Mr. Udall's style. The Conference was organized by Jeffrey Ingram, the club's Southwest Representative, who introduced Mr. Udall.

MR. INGRAM: If there were a Sierra Club meeting that went on for as long as this one has and the Grand Canyon were not mentioned one way or the other it would be surprising. [Laughter.]

I confronted the problem of how to introduce Congressman Udall -- without making any sly remarks about the Grand Canyon and still keep a straight face -- with some trepidation. I never solved the problem so I just decided to put it on the line: that if his energy and his persuasiveness and his patience and his humor were on our side in this fight, we would today have a Grand Canyon National Park which included all of the Grand Canyon [applause]. That applause was for you, Mr. Udall.

Fortunately, very fortunately, these qualities of his usually are on our side, so it is with a straight face, and a very great deal of pleasure, that I introduce him to you today to talk about the proposal to establish a national park in the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona.

CONGRESSMAN UDALL: Precinct workers and fellow Democrats [Laughter.] . . .

I just got back from a meeting in Washington that was more like a wake; to some of the Democratic leaders I announced that this was the first annual meeting of the survivors of the Bataan Death March [laughter], but somebody said he had seen written on the subway walls "God is Dead," and somebody had come along and written underneath it: "Would you believe seriously ill?" [Laughter.]

This is a little bit the way the Democratic party feels today in Arizona and around the nation.

But I am happy to be with you. I debated about coming to the Sierra Club meeting, but after some unfortunate and intemperate remarks on both sides in the late controversy, Jeff and Dave Brower and I had some meetings in which we restored some of the good feeling that has always existed.

I know I carried on a feud with an old friend of mine and then we became friends and collaborators. On a particular project, I wrote him a letter, and the salutation was "Dear Friend (Formerly, you lousy fink)" [Laughter.]

Or the old Congressional standby: the telegram that reads, "Dear Congressman. (Go to hell. Strong letter follows.)" [Laughter.]

But anyway I wanted you to know that I am happy to be with you. The Scriptures admonish us to love thine enemy and do good to them that smite you and so on, and I even let the old grads down in homecoming in Tucson in order to be here today. We have lost five in a row and it'll be six today, I guess. I haven't seen the wires. The only one we won this year was the New Mexico Lobos. [Laughter.] You remember the old *New Yorker* cartoon where the two old grads were standing there in the stands and the crowd filing out and the scoreboard says "Local zero, visitors thirty-five," and they had their hip flasks and were obviously perturbed

because they lost six in a row apparently, and one says to the other, "No, I don't mean in effigy, I mean let's really hang him." [Laughter.]

I was afraid that might be the reception that I would get here today. I can't think of any assignment worse than to talk to a meeting at five o'clock when the proceedings started at nine-thirty. I don't have a prepared text. I made some notes on the back of an old envelope. This has worked for some politicians. This may be known some day as the Santa Fe address. [Laughter.]

But some of you would probably like some refreshment at this time of day stronger than coffee and apples. If you give me fifteen or twenty minutes to ramble and counsel with you a little bit on this Sonoran Desert Park proposal and, perhaps a few other things, maybe privately and quietly in small groups, we can talk about the Grand Canyon and other current problems later on this evening. I am going to be able to stay overnight and stay on for the dinner.

One of the speakers here mentioned the fact that you need an emotional content as the driving force, and we do, and I think your organization and the allied groups have participated in really a great leap forward. The conservation movement in this country has gone between intermittent leaps compressed into a small period of time and long decades of stagnation. Theodore Roosevelt set up the national forests. We had several years of Ickes and Roosevelt and really some big steps forward. We didn't have any new national parks for about twenty years until the late '50's and early '60's when this movement began. It moves forward with a great content of emotionalism. But I am afraid on both sides of controversies like the Grand Canyon there is a temptation to get a little bit bitter and let the invective roll.

It's like the story of the editor: They asked him how he stood on a burning issue and he said, "Well, I haven't made up my mind but when I do I'll be bitter." And I think if I could counsel with you, speaking generally, that there's been a tendency on the part of both sides to overstate the case, to ignore the sound solid points that the other side has to make. I think you can fight these battles and feel very strongly, and feel emotional about them. But I have pledged myself never to attack the motive or the sincerity of the people on the other side, and I think we would all do well to do this. You can go to the little towns in my district that are based on an agricultural economy -- and we in Arizona, I think, are foolish to let this desert go into production and to pump out this resource that was put there over millions of years. Yet I think you can feel how the farmer might react to the problem because between last year and today the well has gone down ten feet more, and the politicians have been threatening or promising to save the river for the last fifty years in the fall of each and every even numbered year, and the farmer sees his costs going up and the water supply going down. He gets a little desperate and he's inclined to suspect the motives of other people, to pass them off as a bunch of vicious do-gooders and so on.

I think we can reason together. We can hit hard and we can disagree, but I hope we will continue to do as we have done in recent months on this Grand Canyon controversy -- at least respect the sincerity of the other fellow's motives and his point of view.

I was lobbying one Cleveland Congressman for a vote on my water bill -- Colorado Water Bill -- last year, and he said, "I may go with you, Mo, but I am good for only one desecration a year." (It was when we were having the fight over extending the west side of the Capitol.) "It has to be either the westfront or the Grand Canyon." [Laughter.]

Well, you can be opposed to all desecrations, I suppose, but I do regret any intemperate remarks I have made or any time I have questioned the motives of the really good fine people that are in these related organizations.

I am just going to hit two or three of the major points in addition to the Sonoran Desert Park, which is the subject I did come to discuss here today, but having come back from the wake in Washington and talking to my fellow Democrats surviving the massacre at the Little Big Horn, let's talk about the new Congress for just a moment, because you might be interested in some observations on this.

We are going to have seventy-three people in the House of Representatives in January who weren't there in the last Congress, and it's hard to generalize. I don't say this from a partisan standpoint because we've had many great leaders -- John Saylor and Larry Burton of Utah just to mention two, because we have a few Utah people

here I understand. The new Republican party has fought the fight and they've done it many times when there wasn't any political gain and it wasn't in their best interests.

But as I analyze the seventy-three people who departed, by and large the cause of conservation and preservation is going to be weaker than it is now, just on our committee. We've lost the Chairman of the National Park Subcommittee, Congressman Rivers of Alaska; and Congressman O'Brien of New York who fought so many fights is gone. I think we have eight or nine vacancies on that Interior Committee, which will be writing the redwoods bill and some of the other legislation you are interested in. I think the new Congress is going to be far less likely to appropriate the money we need, and we need a lot of it right now. I am afraid that big new expenditures for this are going to be pretty hard to get in the conservation field.

We have this dreadful circle that we go around in. If we don't enact the national parks legislation and the wild rivers and the redwoods bills that we need now, we're not going to get them. It's going to be too late. Inland Steel is going to have the Indiana Dunes and we face that now. If you wait very long some of these places that need preserving are going to be gone.

But we're so short on money that we can't pay for the ones we have. One of the big things we ran into with Indiana Dunes was that here we've authorized all these new national parks and monuments and seashores and lakeshores and all the rest and we don't have the money to buy them, and the costs keep going up and the speculators move in. And yet, as I say, if we don't enact the bills now it may very well be too late and all is lost.

So this is one of the dilemmas we're going to face in the new Congress.

I think it's no accident -- again, without being partisan because I give full credit to the many fine members of the party who helped us -- it's been no accident, this great leap of the last six years, which I think is unparalleled in history, the progress we've made -- the wilderness bill, the land and water conservation fund, and the seashore concept and the lakeshore concept, the wild rivers concept, and the many other things that we've done. But this happened at a time when we had large majorities in the Democratic party and a lot of new freshmen who were imbued with the conservation idea, and there's work to be done yet. Oregon Dunes eluded us; Sleeping Bear in Michigan eluded us; the redwoods eluded us, we lost a few other battles, and these are battles that are going to have to be fought in the new Congress and I can't come to you today and be very optimistic about it, because I think we are going to be a little bit weaker, somewhat weaker in this Congress than we were in the last.

So in this context let me talk about the Sonoran Desert National Park for just a moment. I wish we had maps here. I wish we had some pictures. We have some slides that I had shown in Tucson at a mass meeting a few months ago. We have an *Arizona Highways* that did an issue on Organ Pipe National Monument and on the proposed national park.

But one of the great opportunities this next year, in the light of the trouble we have, is that this is a park that doesn't cost any money. It's all federal land. This new park would be made up of three components: The Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, about three hundred thirty some odd thousand acres; another eight hundred and some odd thousand acres, which are now in the Cabeza Prieta Game Refuge under federal administration -- the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife; then we are going to take, if the proposal is enacted, another forty or fifty thousand acres out of the west that are now in public ownership and administered by the Bureau of Land Management. So the proposal is to take about a million point two acres, including the present national monument, and make it into one big new national park. This would be the seventh largest national park. It would be bigger than Grand Canyon National Park, although perhaps not as big if some of the plans of members of this group are carried out in connection with Grand Canyon National Park.

This is a really unique and unusual area and we've got some other things going for us, too.

When the national monument was established in Organ Pipe, this beautiful, beautiful area, there was this old pioneering family there that had several thousand acres of grazing land and they were protected in the National Monument. I am sure you have all read some of the articles about what the overgrazing had done and the threat that it posed to some of the delicate plants, the ecological balance there. In the last year we were finally able to

work out a sale so that these people are moving out and the federal government is buying up their claims and this threat will be eliminated, one obstacle will be eliminated to making it a national park. I am sure Congress wouldn't make this a national park if the grazing had continued or there were any grazing rights. There are a few mining claims still left in the Organ Pipe National Monument and these will have to be bought up, but fortunately there are no huge copper deposits of the kind that there are close to it.

This park then would extend for sixty miles along the Arizona-Mexico border, and it would include a most unusual part of the country. I flew over it in my airplane the other day on the way to Yuma. You think you're on the moon, it's that barren. It's stark; it's very exciting and it's unique and unusual. But one of the things about this proposal is that on the Mexican side of the border -- I am sure there are some of you who have seen this -- there's an area called the Pinacate Lava Fields. This is a million or so acres, with the Pinacate Peak looming off in the distance -- and this adds again to this feeling that you are off on some alien planet -- with this stark black landscape and really strange types of plants that you find, the remnants of this Sonoran Desert as they penetrate to the north -- really strange kinds of cacti and unusual plants.

And there have been some preliminary discussions along the lines that if United States will make this a national park, our part of it, that we could then persuade the Mexican government to set aside the Pinacate area as a Mexican national park, so you would have back-to-back across sixty miles of this border two great national parks. You would have an International Park, similar to what we have on the Canadian border up in Montana. This is one of the really nice features; one of the intriguing ideas.

Another problem that we would have to resolve in this connection is that the Cabeza Prieta Game Refuge has been withdrawn and is being used by the military. This huge area, as I say, sixty to, seventy miles long, is used by the jets for training out of Williams and Yuma and Luke and the other military bases. But they do not make any ground use of it. It is simply used air-to-air, an area to run through to make passes at tow targets and thing of this kind. But with changing military technology and the speed of these jets, supersonic speed of the jets, sixty miles would be nothing. You could go through that in two or three minutes and you would have to start turning as soon as you come into it, and more and more the military are telling me they are going to have to be doing this kind of thing out to sea. This is the only type of place where you have the room to undertake this military training.

So the proposal in my bill is that we go ahead and create the national park, including the Cabeza Prieta Game Range, but that the game range part of it go into the national park only at such time as the military has finished with its military uses in the area and turned it back. If we don't do something like this, the military may well find that they need it for ground maneuvering areas in which case it will be torn up very badly with tanks and trucks and vehicles going across it. But it's an important time to move and we can get it all for nothing. We can get the job done and have a new national park without any outlay for the acquisition of land.

In the context of the makeup and the attitudes of this new Congress and with the Vietnamese war hanging over all expenditure proposals, this may be a big gain that we could make in this Congress.

Well, I am asked, "Why should we preserve this? What opposition to it is there?"

I will cover the points of opposition to it, but the basic reason why we should preserve it is that this is an unusual area -- this has no counterpart. What we tried to do in the National Park System, this unique American concept, is to get big, huge chunks of really unusual, beautiful land that exemplifies a particular kind of terrain, a particular kind of flora and fauna in this country, and to set them aside. This isn't like Death Valley. It's entirely different. This Sonoran Desert starts down in Mexico and penetrates just a little way into the United States. It's entirely different from the Mojave Desert in so many respects. It's entirely different from Death Valley. This Cabeza Prieta Game Range is somewhat different from the Organ Pipe National Monument. It's different from the Saguaro National Monument over by Tucson, which is at a much higher elevation, with a considerably greater growth of desert plants. So the reason we should preserve it is that it is a starkly beautiful area. It's different. It's barren, and some of the objectors say, "Well, this is just a barren waste." This is one reason to preserve it. We don't have anything else like this in the United States and a chunk of it ought to be preserved for that very reason. I was trying to think of some -- in sponsoring this legislation and pushing for it next year -- some quotation that I could find from a learned man, a famous man, and I found one. I guess some

famous philosopher, Socrates, or someone -- perhaps it was even I -- who said it: "Leave it as it is, you cannot improve upon it." [Laughter.]

All right, what do the opponents say? We are getting considerable static in Arizona. In fact, I don't even have definite sponsorship from the other members of the Arizona Congressional delegation and this is often fatal -- they haven't said "no," but they haven't said "yes" on it either. You almost have to have -- the political realities being what they are -- the sponsorship of the members in Congress from the state. This can be a problem. But here are some of the objections, and the main ones come from the hunters, that it would rob the hunters of Arizona of a hunting area. Now, this has never been a significant hunting area. It was set up, the Cabeza Prieta Game Refuge was set up, to preserve the desert bighorn sheep (a very unusual and interesting animal) plus some of the pronghorned antelope -- the little desert antelope that are in that area. I think we can preserve the antelope and bighorn sheep and still preserve the area as a national park. But this is the basis on which most of the Arizona opposition is, and nearly all the writers on fish and wildlife and outdoor writers in Arizona are opposed to it on the grounds that the Park Service does not manage game the way game ought to be managed, and if we turn it over to the Park Service we are not going to be able to preserve and hunt the pronghorned desert antelope and the bighorn desert sheep.

Another objection made by the people in Arizona is that the national park will open up a wilderness to tourists who will mess it up, in a phrase. Well, I think we can see that this hasn't been done in any of the other national parks. Any roads or trails ought to be very inconspicuous and leave great chunks of this thing for all time to come. One of the strongest objections that's made I've covered -- that this is not of national park caliber. It's not Rocky Mountain, it's not Grand Canyon, it's not Glacier, it's not Yellowstone. And I will agree that to many people on first blush when they go in and see it, it is a barren wasteland. But this is the charm of it. Yellowstone isn't Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone isn't Death Valley. This has a uniqueness that you don't find anywhere in the country, and to those I have talked to who studied it, who have sound judgment, this is of national park caliber and should be preserved for that reason.

These are the major objections. I do not tell you that we have the support for it that we need. We need help and we need support.

Now, I am asked, "What can you do about it, if you believe after studying it that it has national park caliber and should be preserved?"

To those of you who want information I have a limited number of the Park Service preliminary report on it. Probably I can get these reproduced if we have to. I think we could find some more of these Arizona Highways to give facts and figures and information about it.

What can an organization like the Sierra Club do in a fight of this kind? Of course, we need to make this a national program, a national objective, a national effort. You don't get a national park established simply because a couple of Congressmen from one state want it. It has to have broad support from all over the country. I've seen what your mimeograph machines can do and the way you can stir up little old ladies in tennis shoes in Michigan, school children in North Carolina -- Dave Brower and others. If you believe with me that this is worth saving and I just wish we had some slides here to show you, then we need a national publicity campaign by all the organizations that would help with this kind of proposal, We need cosponsors of this legislation. I very often co-sponsored bills. I threw in an Indiana Dunes bill and helped carry the fight. I put in a redwoods bill. I put in bills for national parks in other areas. This gives it a national movement flavor and helps if we can get cosponsors, members of Congress, and the kind of people that you might influence to throw in a bill to show that it just isn't one Arizona Congressman that has a bright idea. It becomes a prospect. But it gives a national flavor to it when you get co-sponsors for legislation from other areas, and this is a field where you could give me some help.

Jeff, that's about all that I wanted to say at this late hour of the day on the Sonoran Desert National Park. If we had more time we could go into more detail.

Let me leave you with one other really serious observation of a general nature. I've made this pitch to every kind of conservation, preservation group that I've talked to in the last couple of years, because I think it's the whole heart of the problem. We can carry on these fights and we can carve out some more wilderness and

some more national parks. But we're nearly all done. The land use pattern in this country is almost fixed. We may have one or two more national parks, or three. That's about all we're going to get. I don't think there are many more lakeshores or seashores that are going to be saved. We may save a few wild rivers. We may do the redwoods and clean up the odds and ends that we failed on, but the land use pattern in this country is fixed, almost. Just like they're fixed in Europe. There's no chance in Europe to start a national park system. It's gone. It's been set for centuries. And we've just about reached that point here. And from here on out, I think, the challenge of doing, something about preserving outdoor areas for people who want solitude and wilderness and outdoor experience, winning this fight in the next thirty, forty, fifty years, is going to depend on winning the population fight, because I think this country could support a billion people. We can double-deck everything, the freeways and skyscrapers and all the rest; we can enlarge our cities and build new cities. But you can't double-deck your parks and you can't double-deck your seashores. You've only got so many. I can take you to any city council or any legislature in this country, or any session of Congress, and there'll be four or five burning issues. It may be a road through some park in Denver or it may be some problem down in Albuquerque about tearing down an old house, or a subdivision in a wilderness, or a wild area, but it all relates to this conflict between more and more American people pressing in upon a smaller and smaller area of national resources. We're going to have sixty million more people by the end of the century at least, if not more, and these are not just statistics -- these are people that want to go to the mountains and ski, and they want to play golf, and they want to go to the park the same time you do. They want to see Yellowstone and Grand Canyon and they are going to want to own a car and they're going to want freeways to get to work and all the rest. I seriously say to you that we are fighting a losing battle unless we begin to check the population explosion, and I say this as the father of six children. I was making this pitch on television one night saying, "You know, really, every problem we have, we confront, gets back to this population explosion. We have higher taxes for the school. Why? More children. We've got fights about freeways and roads. Why? Children. We've got trouble in foreign lands. Why? Because the population is exploding and living standards going down. More children." And the fellow said, the interviewer said, "Well, that's very interesting Congressman Udall what do you propose to do about this?" And I said, "As a father of six I can't do very much about it." [Laughter.]

But this is a battle and I think the time is going to come, if you want a constructive suggestion, when the Sierra Club and the National Parks Association and the Garden Clubs and all the groups in the conservation movement ought to have a vice president who works on the population question. You ought to align yourselves with the Planned Parenthood people, if you please.

I introduced the first population bill that was ever introduced in the House of Representatives. The first one. A companion bill to Senator Gruening's bill, and I was told this was suicide -- political suicide. Well, the people are way ahead of the politicians on this one as we have seen in just the last couple of years. It's no longer dangerous to introduce the kind of a bill that I introduced three years ago. But I would like to see conservation organizations coming in and giving testimony, not just on the new parks and the wilderness and the new lake shores and wild rivers and the redwoods bill, but coming in, giving testimony, and writing letters, and cranking up your mimeographs, and getting out bulletins, when population legislation is being considered. We've had a lot of victories together; we fought the Grand Canyon battle on opposite sides, but basically I'm on your team on this thing.

But I think in the long-run, long-range, we lose the whole ball game unless we do something in this field. I wish the population of this country would remain stable at about a hundred and twenty-five or a hundred and fifty million people. We'd be able to do all the things nationally and internationally. But it hasn't. And we're not going to solve this problem overnight.

We've had our differences. I haven't had much sleep since Tuesday night and I'm finding out that I can be funny without even trying.

But I wanted you to know that I come in peace. I'm among friends. I'm on your side. It's like one of my Alabama Congressman's favorite stories -- when I think about all the ones I've picked up from these Southerners -- he tells about the fellow that goes to the annual costume ball dressed as a devil and he has a pitchfork and a mask and he looks very fierce, and has a tail. He had too many libations during the course of the evening, and he became unsteady. He started home staggering down the street and thought he better sit down and saw an open door and went in. It was a little church. The minister had been giving the flock a sermon and said, "Folks, you're all going to have to stand up to the devil sometimes and have to look him in the

eye and tell him you're on the Lord's side and be of good cheer." As he said this he looks up and here's the devil himself. The minister was somewhat of a coward, and as there was an open window behind the pulpit, he bailed out into the alley and fled. He was shortly followed by the whole congregation except for one fat lady who couldn't get through the window. She goes up to the door shaking and she says, Devil, I sure hope you let me through the door." And the devil just stares at her with his pitchfork. Then she said, "Mr. Devil, I really must get home to my husband and children." He stared at her some more and waved the pitchfork. Finally she said, "Mr. Devil, I've been a member of this church for thirty-two years and to tell you the honest-to-God's truth, I've been on your side all the time." [Laughter and applause.]

Last update: June 3, 1996.

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